

Virtue, Vice and the nature of God

Having considered that the purpose of God in salvation and the process of **practical sanctification** is for God to **conform us into His image** by the work of the Holy Spirit, it is important to understand how the image of God and His character is related to how we live our Christian lives in practice, and how that relates to both God's character and ours. In becoming like God, we are taking on His character and "*participating in the divine nature*" and growing evermore in His likeness by the power of the Holy Spirit in us. Let us now consider the important truth that **God is Holy**. That is, He is **set apart** from all other created beings in **moral purity, perfection and self-existence** as the Holy Creator God. The holiness of God is one of God's attributes, and one in fact that characterizes all of God's other attributes. Therefore God's love and mercy are holy, as is His wisdom and justice are holy, that is, they possess a **divine quality** that is **infinite, perfect and complete** in such a way as to be set apart from other kinds of love and mercy, wisdom and justice in the creation. God's majesty and beauty are holy majesty and holy beauty being infinitely and perfectly majestic and beautiful beyond all other things that exist. Moreover, all of God's attributes are **set apart from evil** in every way because of the moral purity of God's holiness. All of God's attributes are completely **pure and untainted** by any kind of impurity of evil. In fact **God's own holiness is the antithesis of evil** and the very standard by which evil is seen and understood. Therefore God hates what is evil and loves what is good, and this is a major theme in the Bible and it is major theme in God's relations with people and His purposes throughout redemptive history. Kevin DeYoung comments... "*There is no question that holiness is one of the central themes in the Bible. The word "holy" occurs more than 600 times in the Bible, more than 700 when you include derivative words like holiness, sanctify and sanctification. You can't make sense of the Bible without understanding that God is holy and that this holy God is intent on making a holy people to live with Him forever in a holy heaven. The whole system of Israel's worship revolves around holiness. That's why you have a holy people (the priests), with holy clothes, in a holy land (Canaan), at a holy place (tabernacle/temple), using holy utensils and holy objects, celebrating holy days, living by a holy law, so that they might be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*" Make no mistake about it God is holy and He expects His people to be holy as well. This He accomplishes through the holy work of Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit within us!

Now this **holiness of God** has everything to do with our **image bearing** and our **Christian practice** as God seeks to **sanctify us** (make us holy) in our character and in our practice, just like He is and just like He does. Therefore He commands us to be holy, just like Him. He calls us to live a holy life and emulate His holy character. This then becomes a major theme in the New Testament as it was given to us by our Lord Jesus and the Apostles.

Matt 5:48 - 48 "Therefore **you are to be perfect**, as your heavenly Father is perfect. NASB

2 Corinthians 7:1 - Therefore, having these promises, beloved, **let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness** in the fear of God. NASB

Titus 2:11-14 - 11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, 12 **instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly** in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus; 14 who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and **purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds**. NASB

1 Peter 1:14-16 - 14 As obedient children, **do not be conformed to the former lusts** which were yours in your ignorance, 15 but like the Holy One who called you, **be holy yourselves also in all your behavior**; 16 because it is written, **"You shall be holy, for I am holy."** NASB

Now because God is holy, perfectly pure and undefiled in every part of His character, He expects holiness from us, His holy people who He has set apart to reflect His character and bear His image. Jerry Bridges comments; *“God rightfully demands perfect holiness in all of His moral creatures. It cannot be otherwise. He cannot possibly ignore or approve of any evil committed. He cannot for one minute relax His standard of holiness. Rather He must say as He does say, “So be holy in all you do”...1 Pet 1:15...”*

It is important to remember the **glory of the Gospel** when we start to focus on **God’s expectation of our personal holiness**. We have a **positional righteousness** or **positional sanctification** before God on the basis of Christ’s life and death (discussed in detail below). We cannot forget that **we have been cleansed** once for all by the death of our Lord Jesus on the cross, and His perfect life of righteousness has been imputed to us by faith. We stand in the spotless righteousness of Christ, God’s wrath toward our sin has been appeased (**propitiation**), our guilt has been removed (**expiation**), Christ’s righteousness has been imputed to us by faith (**imputation**), and all of this has brought about **reconciliation** with God. God has now **declared us righteous** in His sight on the basis of Christ’s perfect life and death. This is called **Justification by Faith**. We are now in a state of grace having all our sins forgiven and possessing the hope of eternal life. If you have been born again by the Holy Spirit and believed upon the Lord Jesus Christ as a result, all of these wonderful blessings from God are surely yours! But now that we have been saved by the grace of God through faith in our Lord Jesus alone, **God expects us to live in holiness** and prove the reality of our faith and love toward Him in obedience to His holy Word! At the same time that our sins are forgiven, God is commanding us to forsake our sins and behave in a holy way.

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But **what does holiness look like in our lives?** In short, it is conformity to God’s holy character and also His practice. We are to be holy in our hearts and that in turn produces holiness in our practice, our daily lives. Therefore **God’s Word is very specific** about what **holiness** actually looks like both in our heart and in our life. The Word is filled with instruction and exhortations toward this end. The New Testament therefore calls us to **“put off”** the evil deeds of the flesh, the old nature of sin which still lives in us, and to **“put on”** Christ, or the new nature which has been re-created in us at regeneration.

Romans 13:12-14 - 12 The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand. **Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light**. 13 Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. 14 **But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts**. NASB

Colossians 3:8-11 - 8 But now you also, **put them all aside**: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, **since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices**, 10 **and have put on the new self** who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him NASB

These **deeds of the flesh**, or **acts of the sinful nature** are called **vices**. They are thoughts, words and deeds that the Bible identifies as **evil**. One thing is sure, God's Word calls out sin by name and explains that it is deadly, destructive and contrary to God's commanded will and very displeasing to Him. Vice is sin and evil and God hates it and God judges and reproves those who commit it. Therefore God's Word is crystal clear about what sin is, giving whole **lists of vices** and telling us to forsake them. The **vices** are **contrary** to the character and **nature of God**. In contrast to these vices are the **virtues of God**, which give to us a very specific definition of what holiness looks like. **Virtue** manifests itself in thoughts, words and deeds just like vices. **Virtues** are extolled as pleasing to God, beneficial to ourselves and our neighbor, and opposite of vices. Therefore God's Word is crystal clear about what virtue is, giving whole **lists of virtues** and telling us to perform them and allow them to define our character. **Virtue** is **consistent** with the character and **nature of God**. And so we see both virtue and vice described in detail in the New Testament giving us instruction as to how to live and please God, what TO do and what NOT to do in order to live a holy life. Holiness looks like a life lived in virtue instead of vice. Growing in **personal holiness** and **practical sanctification** are effectively the **same thing**. We grow in holiness as we are conformed to the image of Christ by the Holy Spirit. Holiness and wickedness are held in stark contrast in the Christian life, as the below **virtue** and **vice lists** put on display.

Vice lists - Here is a **list** of Scriptures that define **vices** for us and show us what the character of the **evil** and **wicked** people are. These vices do not please God and are the kind of behavior that characterize the wicked and unbelieving people of the world, who do not know God, obey Jesus Christ, and will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

Mark 7:21-23 - 1 "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the **evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, 22 deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness.** 23 "All **these evil things** proceed from within and defile the man." NASB

Romans 1:26-32 - 26 For this reason God gave them over to **degrading passions**; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, 27 and in the same way also the men abandoned **the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts** and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. 28 And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, 29 being filled with all **unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful**; 32 and, although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also **give hearty approval to those who practice them.** NASB

Romans 13:13-14 - 13 Let us behave properly as in the day, not in **carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy.** NASB

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 - 9 Or do you not know that **the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?** Do not be deceived; **neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, 10 nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God.** 11 And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God. NASB

Galatians 5:19-22 - 19 Now the **deeds of the flesh** are evident, which are: **immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these,** of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that **those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.** NASB

Ephesians 4:31 - 31 Let all **bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.** NASB

Colossians 3:5-9 - 5 Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to **immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.** 6 For it is on account of these

things that the wrath of God will come, 7 and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. 8 But now you also, put them all aside: **anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth.** 9 **Do not lie to one another**, since you laid aside the old self with its **evil practices**, NASB

1 Timothy 1:8-10 - 8 But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, 9 realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous man, but for those who are **lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers 10 and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers**, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching, NASB

Revelation 21:8 - 8 "But for the **cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars**, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." NASB

These vices are in fact the wicked deeds that characterized our former life as unregenerate sinners and as Christians we are called to forsake these sins, to make war against them and **“put off”** these acts of the sinful nature, through faith in Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Virtue lists - Here is a list of Scriptures that define **virtues** for us and what the character of **godly** believing born again **Christians** should be like. These virtues are very pleasing to God and are the kind of behavior that should characterize the lives of Christians, who are **image bearers** being conformed to God’s image by the power of the Holy Spirit within them.

Romans 12:9-19 - Let **love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.** 10 **Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;** 11 **not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;** 12 **rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer,** 13 **contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.** 14 **Bless those who persecute you; bless and curse not.** 15 **Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.** 16 **Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.** 17 **Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men.** 18 **If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.** 19 **Never take your own revenge**, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. NAS

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 - 4 **Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant,** 5 **does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered,** 6 **does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;** 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. NASB

Galatians 5:22-23 - 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,** 23 **gentleness, self-control**; against such things there is no law. NASB

Ephesians 4:32 - 32 And **be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other**, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. NASB

Colossians 3:12-15 - 12 And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of **compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience;** 13 **bearing with one another, and forgiving each other**, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 And beyond all these things **put on love**, which is the perfect bond of unity. 15 And **let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts**, to which indeed you were called in one body; and **be thankful**. NASB

2 Peter 1:5-7 - 5 Now for this very reason also, **applying all diligence**, in your faith supply **moral excellence**, and in your moral excellence, **knowledge**; 6 and in your knowledge, **self-control**, and in your self-control, **perseverance**, and in your perseverance, **godliness**; 7 and in your godliness, **brotherly kindness**, and in your brotherly kindness, **love**. NASB

These virtues are in fact the character and nature of the Holy Spirit who lives in us and the **end goal** of our **growth in holiness** for our daily lives. These virtues should now begin to characterize our life as Christians with ever increasing intensity as we take on the image of God more and more by the work of the Holy Spirit in us. In our struggle against the sinful nature we are to renew our minds with the beautiful and wonderful thoughts of the virtues of God, longing for and pursuing His righteousness in our daily life as children of God, born from above.